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THE POLICY OF EMANCIPATION.

WORDS OF A TRUE DEMOCRAT.

LETTER FROM ROBERT DALE OWEN.

From the N. Y. Evening Post, August 8th, 1862.

A STRONG WORD IN SEASON.

We have not published, since the beginning of the war, a more significant or persuasive document than the following letter of Robert Dale Owen to Secretary Stanton The style and tone of it indicate that it was not intended for the public eye, having been sent some ten days ago to the eminent public officer to whom it is addressed—an old friend of Mr. Owen's of many years' standing—in the unreserved freedom of private correspondence; but coming by chance under the observation of several gentlemen of this city, they solicited a copy of it from Mr. Owen for publication. He cheerfully complied with the request, in the hope that his views might be useful to others.

Mr. Owen is well known in this country as a gentleman on whom the democratic party has hitherto largely bestowed its confidence; he was for many years one of its representatives in Congress from the state of Indiana, subsequently our *chargé d'affaires* at the Neapolitan court, and is now the associate of Judge Holt in the investigation and settlement of complicated transactions of the government. In all his public trusts he has discharged his duties with fidelity, ability and honor. A careful observer of men and things, accustomed to habits of impartial thought, he has studied the phenomena of our civil war without taking much active part in events, and the results of his studies we have in this brief letter to Mr. Stanton. Mr. Owen sees, what hundreds of other democrats had begun to see before him, that there can be no speedy, satisfactory or final termination of this war until slavery is, in some way or other, put in process of extinction.

We are not authorized to speak for Mr. Stanton himself, nor for Judge Holt, nor for General Dix; but if certain rumors that have come to us are not greatly exaggerated, we think we should not be far wrong in claiming for them a general concurrence in the reasonings of Mr. Owen. Be that as it may, we know that other leading democrats, no less eminent than these, have been brought, by the experiences of the past few months, to arrive at the same conclusions. We know, for instance, that such men as Daniel S. Dickinson, Francis B. Cutting, ex-Governor Boutwell, Orestes A. Brownson, General Mitchel, General Hunter, General Lew. Wallace, General Rousseau, General Dumont, General Cochrane, and others of less note, make no concealment of their convictions that the war must put an end to slavery or slavery will put an end to the Union. These men were all democrats. Could the old conditions of political parties be restored they would, doubtless, be democrats again; but they are not democrats who refuse to be taught by events, or who, like the old Bourbons, never forget and never learn anything. They see that the outbreak of a slaveholders' war has changed essentially the relations of slavery to the state, and they guide their minds, not by the old party traditions, or according to circumstances which have forever passed away, but by the light of existing events.

We of the North can no doubt whip the rebels by arms; we can drive them out of Richmond into the cotton states; we can pursue them through the thousand swamps of the cotton states into the Gulf of Mexico; it would take time and money and life to do so; but we could do it all beyond a peradventure. But the Union would not be thereby restored. The same elements of discord would still exist; the same feuds would break out; and no permanent peace or permanent harmony would be possible until the respective social systems of the North and South are rendered homogeneous by the extinction of the only difference between them. We must go on fighting forever in this kind of desultory civil war; or else we must form coterminous states of diverse civilizations, which would fight no less perpetually; or finally, looking the problem right in the heart of it, resolve to restore the Union on the only basis on which, after what has occurred, a restoration seems to be possible, namely, the establishment of free institutions and a free system of society in all the component parts.

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To the Hon. Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War:

My political antecedents are known to you. Always a democrat, but never a pro-slavery democrat; opposed, in principle and feeling, from my youth up, to human slavery, but believing, until recently, that, in the interests of liberty itself, it was the part of wisdom in the North to abstain from interference with the danger-fraught domestic institution of the South, and to trust to time for its eradication; opposed, with a hereditary aversion, to war, I was willing, before the sword was drawn, to make any honorable concessions that might avert its horrors.

But political convulsions bring with them great lessons and new duties. War would not, under the Divine economy, have been permitted, as in all past ages it has been, if it had not its mission. But to attain the good it brings we must recognise its necessities.

No civil war of proportions so gigantic as that now raging ever existed in the world before. It differs from all others, both in the results sure to ensue from its protraction beyond a brief period, and in the conditions under which, out of evil, it may eventuate in good. In calculating these, time is an essential element.

Seven or eight hundred millions are spent. At the best, as much more is likely to go. Two thousand millions or upwards is not an improbable total. That is half the national debt of England; and the interest on it (probably at almost double the rate she pays) will make our annual burden nearly equal to hers. If the war lasts three years longer, these figures may be doubled. It must not last three years longer, unless we are willing to risk national bankruptcy.

How is it to be terminated?

By concession? That is no longer in our power. We can buy a truce, a pause, by concession to the South; nothing more.

By force of arms, then? But if by force, it must be quickly done. Delay is defeat.

And it must be effectually done. After one such war the nation may revive, its energies still elastic; solvent still, and respected. A second will ruin it financially, to say nothing of worse ruin. To save the country, then, the war must not terminate without a sufficient guaranty against its resumption.

How can the war be quickly and effectually terminated? What guaranty is sufficient, that it will not be resumed?

Gradually, very gradually, as this contest proceeded, have I been approaching the conviction that there is but one such guaranty: the emancipation of negro slaves throughout this continent. Perhaps—but as to this I am less certain—that measure is the only sure means of terminating, quickly and effectually, this war. The recent reverse under General McClellan, the scattered rebel fires daily bursting forth in states which our forces had already overrun, the fact that we are fighting against brave men of our own race, all increase the probability that we must deprive the South of a legal right to its four millions of laborers, before we can succeed against their masters in a reasonable time and in an effectual manner.

I am not an advocate of revolutionary short-cuts out of a difficulty. I am not in favor of violating the constitution by way of escaping a danger. There might be immediate advantage, but the precedent is replete with peril.

Could slavery have been abolished, by northern action, while peace yet existed between the North and South, without a violation of the constitution? in other words, without a revolutionary act? Clearly not. Can slavery be eradicated now, in war, without such violation? If emancipation be necessary to ensure the permanent peace and safety of our government, and if we are willing to pay to all loyal slave-owners a reasonable price for their slaves, clearly yes.

For no principle in law is better established than this, that when important public interests demand it, private property may be taken, at a fair appraisement, for public use. The opening of a street in improving a city, the running of a railroad, are held, in this and other civilized countries, to be objects of sufficient importance to justify what the French law calls "*appropriation forcée pour cause d'utilité publique.*"

But of importance how utterly trivial is the opening of a street or of a railroad compared to the preservation, in its integrity, of the greatest republic upon earth!

Ought we to declare general emancipation, coupled with a provision for the payment, to all loyal slaveholders, of the fairly appraised value of their slaves? This question resolves itself into another: Have things gone so far that the Union, in its peaceful integrity, and negro-slavery within its borders, can no longer co-exist? That is THE GREAT QUESTION OF THE DAY. I think it must be answered, even now, in the affirmative. Every month that passes is converting hundreds of thousands of moderate and conservative and peace-loving men to the same opinion. They despair of sectional friendship or national peace, until the teeming cause of mortal hatred and civil war is rooted out for ever.

Have we the means of paying loyal slave-owners a fair price for their slaves? If we act now, before a protracted contest has exhausted our resources, yes. If we wait the termination of a three or four years' war, very certainly, no.

In that price deportation must not be estimated. The South asserts that negro slaves are indispensable to her. That is only so far true, that she does absolutely need hired negro workmen, and ought not to be deprived of them. Her agriculture would, for a time, be ruined without them. But no good man desires a settlement under which any section of our country would be even temporarily ruined.

Nor can it be doubted that the South, however strong her prejudices and traditions in favor of owning her laborers, has herself been brought, by the perils of the hour, to think seriously of a change of system as the only means left her to obtain aid and comfort from Europe. Nor can all

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her leaders be wholly blind to the fact that such a change of system would advance, in the end, beyond calculation, her material prosperity.

Suppose a declaration, to the effect that the government, urged by the necessity of self-preservation, takes, at a fair valuation, the slave property of the South! Will such a declaration cause a negro insurrection and indiscriminate assassination of whites throughout the slave states? The result, so far, has clearly shown that the negro, mild and long-suffering, and often attached to his owner, is little disposed to resist, under an organization of his own. Once assured of freedom, he will gradually join our cause—that is all. He can then be hired as laborer or soldier, as may seem fit—payment being made for him if his master proves to be loyal, and his services being confiscated if these are due to a rebel. In all this we are clearly in our right.

Look now at the question in its foreign aspect, under the chances of European intervention. Be those chances great or small, intervention may occur, and that ere long.

If it occur, its character will chiefly depend upon what shall have been the antecedent action of our government in regard to slavery.

If, previously to such intervention, we shall have issued a general declaration of emancipation, then we shall stand before Europe as the champions of human liberty, while our enemies will be regarded as the advocates of human servitude. Public opinion in England, in France and throughout Europe, generally, will then prevent the respective governments from intervening, except it be in our favor. No European government dare place itself in the attitude of a slavery protector.

If, on the contrary, we shall have left the issue as it now stands, our policy indicated only by the Confiscation act, not broadly and boldly announced, and more especially if the South, despairing of saving her favorite institution, concedes, as the price of foreign recognition and support, a voluntary system of gradual emancipation—not at all an unlikely move—then the sympathy of public opinion throughout Europe will be with the South, and will sustain any action in her favor.

Think, too, in such an event, how false our position! how low we shall have fallen in the eyes of the world! how unenviable the place we shall occupy in history through all time!

It is idle gasconade to say that, thus situated, we can defy Europe. Let the South, by conceding emancipation, secure the sympathy and the permanent services of her four millions of laborers, without action of ours; then throw into the scale against us the thirty millions of England, the forty millions of France,—and who shall say how many tens of millions besides?—and what chance for success, or for reputation, shall we have, struggling for nothing nobler than self-existence, in equivocal attitude before the world, matched against opponents who shall have forestalled us and assumed the initiative of progress?

While the contest assumes no higher character than that of a portion of a great nation desiring a separation from the mother country and forcibly casting off its authority, what more sympathy can we expect from Europe than we ourselves gave to Spain when she lost Mexico, or to Mexico when Texas struck for independence? Until the issue is changed, so that the great question of human liberty becomes involved in it, we must expect from European powers at the best only indifference; coupled, probably, with the feeling that as Mexico succeeded against Spain and Texas against Mexico, so will a Southern Confederacy finally maintain itself against us.

That a declaration of emancipation was not issued a year ago, I do not regret. Great changes must mature in public opinion before they can be safely carried out. Extreme measures, to be justified and to be effectual, must often be preceded by long-tried conciliation. Yet in national emergencies it may be as dangerous to disappoint as to anticipate public opinion. And I confess my fears for the result if decisive measures are longer delayed.

Stand where we are we cannot; and to go on is less dangerous than to retrace our steps. We ought never to have proposed emancipation with compensation to loyal slave-owners, nor declared to the disloyal, as by law we have, that their slaves shall be liberated without compensation, if we did not intend to follow out the policy we commenced. We have incurred the odium; let us reap the benefit.

Nor do I perceive how we can free the slaves of rebels, yet reasonably expect to retain slavery in the border states, even in case they persist in refusing the offer of the President. Having intervened so far, extirpation of slavery, the only effectual policy, becomes the safest also.

All men in the North will not acquiesce. Neither did all acquiesce when the war was commenced; yet who that is loyal opposes it now? And what would have been the result had we waited, ere we commenced the war, for unanimity?

Some will fall off. So be it! There is small loss in that. And there is some gain. Better an open enemy than a worthless friend. It is time that men were taking sides. As things now stand I see no use in conciliating the half-loyal. He who is not for us is against us.

I think the people are ready. I believe that the loyal citizens of the North, with such small proportion of exceptions as in radical national changes must be disregarded, are to-day prepared for emancipation. They have paid for it in treasure, in blood; not by their option. They feel that the sacrifices they have made, and have still to make, are too vast to have been incurred, except in purchase of a great pledge of perpetual safety and peace.

Reflecting men feel, too, that such a pledge is a national, not merely a northern, necessity. The South, exhausted and suffering, needs it to the full as much as we. She will soon perceive, if she does not already, that two parts of one nation, or even two coterminous nations, can never again

exist in amity on this continent, one slave and the other free. She cannot but see that fugitive-slave-law difficulties, if no others existed, would suffice to prevent this.

It is not the question whether a paper declaration, easily issued, will or will not be followed by a thousand practical difficulties. The uprooting of an ancient and gigantic abuse always involves such. Nor should we be called upon to predict in advance (for who can entirely foresee?) how each of these will ultimately be solved. The true question is, whether greater difficulties, even insuperable ones, do not beset any other policy. Pressed home as we are, to avoid obstacles is impossible. We can but select the least formidable. The lives of the best of us are spent in choosing between evils.

When dangers surround us, we must walk, in a measure, by faith. Let us do what we can, and leave to God the issue. We may best trust to Him when we enter His path of progress. He aids those who walk in it.

I feel assured that final success awaits us in pursuing such a path. And I see no other road out of the darkness.

ROBERT DALE OWEN.

New York, July 23, 1862.

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